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CALIFORNIA MISSION MEETING

by DORIS E. FOSTER

A visit to one or more of the four Franciscan Missions in California is like walking back two hundred years. It is in these missions that you see, feel, and know living history because today the Padres provide a direct link with the past. And it is in these missions where you become a part of history by standing on the very spot where California was born, as these missions have been called the "birthplace of California".

The Franciscan order was founded in 1209 by St. Francis (San Francisco de Asis), who was born at Assisi in Umbria, Italy, in 1182 and died October 4, 1226.

The Franciscans have been an important part in the history of the Western Hemisphere. They helped Christopher Columbus launch his search for the New World. And for many centuries they have pioneered, explored and brought civilization to primitive areas and peoples.

How appropriate then that The Historical Societies in California sponsored the First Annual California Mission Meeting, which was held on Saturday, May 13, and Sunday, May 14, 1961.

The first general get-together was held at 3 p.m. on Saturday, May
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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

At the May meeting of the Society's Board of Directors, a committee was appointed to prepare our official headquarters in the "Old Court House". Herbert Voight, assisted by Clinton Collins, Sanford Grover and Cecil Neeley, are preparing to obtain heavy window screens, new locks, proper shelving, etc. necessary for suitable working and storage space.

We urge all Society members to inform us of material of historical value that people will be willing to donate. We are also securing the historical items now owned by the Society and stored in various places in Madera County.

Members of our Society journeyed to Fresno to join the Fresno Society June 24, 1962, for a Sunday picnic and tour of the Fort Miller Blockhouse and Kearney Mansion. The "Blockhouse" has been reconstructed in Roeding Park from its original dwelling at abandoned Fort Miller. Contained within are relics of Fort Miller days and items such as cooking utensils, clothing, pictures and Indian artifacts representative of Fresno County's past.

All also enjoyed "Kearney Mansion", home and business office of Martin Theodore Kearney, wealthy landowner and raisin grower. One quickly stepped back into a grandiose Edwardian era within these picturesque walls.

Maud Lindemann
President

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13 in San Miguel at Padre Martin Hall, which is a converted USO building used by Camp Roberts' personnel during World War II. At the end of the war, the building was given to the Mission San Miguel, and the Fathers and the Novices have been repairing and remodeling it to fit their present needs.

Father Regis Rohder, Superior of San Miguel, was the official host. He welcomed all who were present, about 100 delegates. Each one was required to register his name, address and historical society affiliation, which information was transferred to his respective badge.

Following these formalities, the delegates were taken on a field trip to the Mission San Miguel, which is just across the road and in front of Padre Martin Hall. This tour was conducted by one of the oldest of the Franciscan Fathers and he opened up the entire Mission for inspection by the guests. They were shown the private quarters and the living rooms of the Fathers and of the Novices. All of these rooms were quite small and very simply furnished.

The old Mission kitchen is still in use and the old round baking oven still stands on its stone base, and to this day reeks with the smoke of many years. All of the millstones in the kitchen were brought from Mexico.

There were several museum rooms filled with church utensils, vestments, and other relics of a day long gone. Numerous rooms once destroyed had been restored and refurnished with authentic items used long ago by the Padres and the Indians. For the first time to anyone, the new Art Gallery and Museum was opened to the group. Many of the art works on exhibition had been done by the Fathers, while others were of outside talent. Also included here were many treasures of the early days.

Out in the patio the walls have all been restored, where once stood the storerooms for grain, hides, and tallow, and the weaving rooms, and other shops of the early Mission days. A low adobe wall provides the attractive front garden with some privacy without obscuring the corridor.

A long corridor extends along the front of the adobe convento building and this cloister walk is particularly interesting; its roof supported on three square pillars. These pillars are the original ones and are still intact. A series of twelve arches carry the rest of the roof, which is tile made by the Indians. These beautiful arches are quite unique in that they are not uniform, a feature often found in handmade works of art.

Near the church end of the corridor, an old bell, dated 1800, is hung from the rafter under the eaves. To the left of the church a strong wooden frame supports another bell weighing 2500 pounds and cast in San Francisco in 1888 from several old bells, including the first bell used in the original dedication of the Mission. This bell sounds the daily Angelus. San Miguel has never possessed a tower and its facade is very simple.

The group was then taken to the church which is the original building. The interior is very unusual and unique in that the decorations are the original and not retouched. They are practically in the same condition in which the Padres left them. The artist was Estaban Munras who was brought from Spain in 1821 to finish the interior decorations. The coloring is wholly Indian though most of the designs used were Spanish. Mostly local colors were used on the walls, which were plaster, and some of these colors are still quite vivid. The blue cobalt color came from Mexico.

The doors to the front entrance



MISSION SAN MIGUEL

swing on hinges hand forged by the Indians. The church is 144 feet long, 27 feet wide and 35 feet high. The walls are 6 feet thick. The timbers, all Monterey Pine, came from Cambria in the Santa Lucia Mountains, 40 miles away. The magnificent beams of the ceiling rest on large carved corbels. Of all the mission ceilings no other equals San Miguel in strength and beauty. All original windows were made of cowhide, now replaced with glass. One unusual feature of the church was the choir loft which was located at the back of the church near the ceiling. Mostly, according to the guide, these lofts are located on the side or near the front. The reredos - or partition wall located behind the altar - has three large panels topped by an elaborate frieze and separated by pillars painted blue to represent fluted columns. This all makes a background for the altar, one of the best of the mission period. There are three statues, the central one being a six foot carved wooden statue of St. Michael

Archangel. The smaller side statues are of St. Anthony and St. Francis. Over the altar shines a brightly-gilded carving of wood shaped like the sun, with gilt darts radiating from it. On the right, attached to the wall with steps leading to it, is the pulpit which is octagonal, painted inside in blue with a band of yellow. Outside, the panels are green enclosed in a blue, red and gray molding. Over it hangs a crown-shaped canopy with curved panels which unite to support a bell-shaped finial surmounted by a cross. The entire floor was of tile and in aisles and other areas of constant usage, the tiles were quite worn. The stone foundations of the church were laid in 1816 and the building was completed in 1818.

San Miguel stretches her length far along the highway. The Mission is located 7 miles north of Paso Robles on U.S. Highway 101 in San Luis Obispo County, about halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

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It was in July, 1797, that a very small cavalcade of men - less than a dozen - found their way along a very crooked river course, later known as the Salinas River, to a site marked two years previously for a new mission. The little rivers of Santa Isabel and San Marcos assured water for building San Miguel. These men had come from San Juan Bautista having founded a mission there. It was planned to build missions so that there would be only a day's journey between them. Father Buenaventura Sitjar was in charge but only remained two years. He was replaced by Father Juan Martin who worked heart and soul for San Miguel and spent the remaining 27 years of his life. Founding a mission was the work of a few hours; building a mission the steady, grinding labor of years.

By the end of 1798 the Mission had 939 animals and 430 bushels of grain had been harvested. Building went steadily on. In 1806 a fire broke out and destroyed two rows of buildings and a part of the church roof. Also, many stored provisions were lost. Neighboring missions came to San Miguel's aid and by the end of the year the destroyed buildings had been rebuilt and 27 new dwellings erected.

Mission life was simple - floors were bare, beaten earth, benches and tables made of roughly hewn timbers, beds were made by stretching rawhide over frames. For heat, there were a limited number of fireplaces. Breakfast consisted of a mush made of corn meal. At noon they had a thick soup of grain, fresh vegetables and meat. After a siesta there was more work, followed by a simple supper, evening prayers and bed.

Until 1833 the Padres kept statistics which revealed some interesting facts; the year 1806 was the largest wheat crop. In 1822 there were more than 10,000 head of cattle, 1500 horses and 1200 sheep at San

Miguel Mission. Then followed several years of extreme poverty and many of the Fathers had to be removed from the Mission because of illness.

By 1825, Mexico, independent of Spain, was in control of most of the missions in the area of San Miguel. The Mexicans, however, had trouble with the Indians as the latter preferred their life with the Padres. San Miguel Mission was one of the last to be removed from church control. This was in 1836. From that year on the Mission began to deteriorate and in 1845 the Mexicans sold Mission San Miguel to one of their countrymen, a man by the name of Rios, and his partner, William Reed. Three days later Commodore Sloat arrived at Monterey and ordered Mission San Miguel left in the charge of the Padres until ownership could be decided by the U.S. Courts. In July, 1846, Lt. Colonel John C. Fremont arrived at Mission San Miguel and camped on the hill just back of the Mission. He and his army rested and ate many of Rios' and Reed's sheep. Some four days later, Fremont started south and returned in October and took Mission San Miguel. The church was returned to the Catholic Church and for several years the other Mission buildings were rented for living quarters, a saloon, a store and a dance hall. By 1878 the Fathers were again in charge of Mission San Miguel and continued to rebuild and repair, just as they are doing today.

From the guided tour of Mission San Miguel Church, the group returned to Padre Martin Hall by way of the garden and cemetery, where are buried over 2000 Indians.

The third session of the meeting convened at 5 p.m. Father Regis again welcomed everyone and introduced Mrs. Louisiana Dart, a Vice-President at Large of the State Historical Society, who asked that every-

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THE GENTLEMAN STAGE ROBBER

by

KENNETH C. HOPPER

It was way back in the spring of 1888, when California was just beginning to emerge from the pioneer stage. I was a lad of 8 summers, living with my parents in the small Spanish town of San Miguel.

My father, who was a blacksmith by trade, had gone to Santa Maria, about 100 miles further south, to work in a shop for his brother, and had sent for us to come. San Miguel was, at that time, the southern terminal of the railroad. From that point to San Luis Obispo, a distance of 60 miles, one had to travel by stage coach.

These stage coaches, the last word in luxury and a joy to behold, were entirely something else to ride if you were not a good sailor. They were the big, double-decked ConCORDs, the body resting on rawhide straps running fore and aft. The motive power was furnished by 6 spirited horses.

Driver of this swank equipage, on the occasion of which I write, was Jim Myers, one of California's most renowned "knights of the ribbons". Jim's run was originally out of San Francisco to points south, but progress in the guise of the railroad was gradually but surely cutting down the runs of the stage coach to final extinction.

On April 21 my mother, with my sister, aged 5, and I took the stage in the early afternoon, with 5 other passengers, mother being the only woman aboard. The ride down the Salinas Valley behind those 6 galloping horses was a thrilling experience for a lad of 8 - that is, it was for the first few miles. Roads in those days were not the paved,

highspeed thoroughfares of today; dirt roads full of ruts and chuckholes over which the stage rocked and rolled on its rawhide springs.

I soon lost interest in the galloping horses and the crack of Jim's long six-horse whip. Mother, who was sitting next the door on the right of the coach, noticed my disinterest and questioned me. I told her I was homesick. She felt my brow, found it hot and clammy, said, "Young man, you had better sit here by the window where you can stick your head outside."

I made it in time to save the situation, but lost everything else, after which I perked up and wanted to get outside on the driver's box, but this pleasure was denied me, which later proved fortunate.

At dusk we reached the foot of the Questa grade over San Luis Mountain. This was a steep winding road of some 4 miles to the summit and about the same down the southern side.

By this time everybody in the coach was acquainted, and it was a jolly company as the stage wound its way up the grade in the bright moonlight. Talk somehow drifted to stage robberies; one man remarked that this would be a wonderful place for a hold-up. This conversation did not meet with my personal approval - especially that last remark.

I stuck my head out the window fully expecting to see a robber - and there he was! I had looked out just in time to see a man jumping down from the bank to the road in front of the leaders.

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I jerked my head back into the coach and shouted, "Robbers!"

By this time the stage had come to a halt. The robber was holding the bit of the near leader with one hand and in the other was a big six-shooter trained on the driver.

"Get those hands into the air, Jim," said the robber.

"I can't," said Jim. "I have to hold the lines."

"Never mind, I'll hold the horses," said the robber. "You wrap the lines around the brake, get down off the box and come up here to me while I see if you got a gun - and tell everybody to sit quiet."

Jim did as he was ordered and walked up to the bandit, who stuck his gun in Jim's midriff while he went over him for concealed weapons. The driver was not armed so he was told to get back on the seat and hold the lines.

"Throw the box off onto the ground," ordered the bandit. Myers reached down into the front "boot", lifted out the Wells Fargo strong box and dumped it over the left wheel onto the ground. All this really happened in less time than it takes to tell it.

Meanwhile, we were all sitting quietly in the stage wondering what would happen next. We were not long left in doubt.

The scene was certainly ideal for a holdup. At the right was a bank 4 or 5 feet high, while at the left, some 6 feet from the wheels of the stage, was a sheer drop of about 15 feet.

The robber, who had a black hood with holes cut to see through pulled over his head, now left his position at the head of the team and came around to the left of the stage stop-

ping opposite the front wheels.

"Everybody get out of the stage with your hands in the air, and line up on the road," was his next order. One of the passengers leaned over and whispered to mother to sit still. The 5 men climbed out and stood in a row, facing the edge of the road with hands in air.

The robber now produced hoods similar to the one he wore, except they were made of blue and white striped bed ticking and were without eye holes. While the men stood with hands in air, the highwayman, walking behind them, put a hood in the right hand of each. He then told them to take off their hats and pull the hoods over their heads. Now he made them turn around and face the stage. He then walked back and threw a hood up to the driver with orders to put it on.

He came to the door of the stage, looked in, and discovered mother and us children. Thinking, no doubt, that mother was the wife of one of the men lined up, he said, "That's fine, madam, you and the children just sit quietly and you will not be harmed."

Young as I was, I could not help being impressed with the gentleness of his voice, which was low and kindly and clearly indicated that he was no ordinary roughneck, but a man of some education and refinement. His words affected my mother in the same way as she immediately relaxed and began to take an interest in what was going on. As for myself, I was all eyes and ears. I never missed a thing that happened. As a matter of fact the reporters in San Luis Obispo that night got a clearer story of the affair from me than from any of the other passengers.

With the men lined up in the total darkness of their hoods, the robber went over each one carefully in search of weapons, meanwhile talking to each

THE GENTLEMAN STAGE ROBBER

one pleasantly as he searched him. He found no weapons of any kind. Next, he went down the line again, this time making the men hand out their money and other valuables.

He was taking a small gold watch from one man - a Mr. Long - when Long broke down and said, "My God, mister, please do not take that watch. It belonged to my wife and she has just died. It is all I have of hers and I would just as soon you would kill me if you are going to take it."

The robber paused for a moment, then said, "I am sorry. Of course I would not know about that. Here is your watch," and he put the watch back in Long's pocket.

As he was frisking the man on the end of the line, mother had a happy thought. If she made the robber believe one of the men was her husband, she would be safe from search, so she said to him, "As you have taken all our money, won't you leave us enough for our hotel bill in San Luis Obispo?"

The robber laughed and said, "Maybe I will. Wait and see how big a haul I make." Later on in the proceedings he made good this promise - made, I thought in jest - and handed the man a \$10 gold piece. He now let the men lower their arms.

He next turned his attention to the Wells Fargo strong box, breaking it open with a short-handled axe.

Of course my mother and I were the only ones able to see what was taking place. As there had been no violence thus far, mother had perked up considerably. In fact, she began to get mad. To think that all these men were simply standing by, while this lone robber took everything they had without them trying to do something about it, was more than she could stand.

"Haven't any of you men got a gun?"

mother asked with scorn. There was no response. The robber laughed as he broke open the box. "Well," he said, "I got you all at just the right time, didn't I." This was just a little too much for mother.

"Well," she said, "if I had a gun I would shoot you!"

"Madam, if you really want to kill me, perhaps you could use one of these," and he lifted out a bunch of razors from the strong box. That was enough for mother; she shuddered and said nothing more.

As I remember it, the strong box yielded about \$3,000.

Time was passing and I was tired, cold and hungry, so I got right down to brass tacks to get this thing over with (incidentally, breaking into the news headlines in a big way the next day). Gathering together all my nerve, I burst forth with the following epic:

"Say Mr. Robber, won't you please hurry? I'm tired and hungry and we want to get to San Luis Obispo to-night." I did not see any humor in the situation and was somewhat chagrined when the robber and even some of the victims in the road burst out laughing. I thought Jim Myers would roll off his seat.

"All right, sonny," says my robber friend, "I'll hurry just as fast as I can. It won't be long now." He then went to the back of the stage where he unstrapped the rear boot and let the mail sacks slide to the ground. These he proceeded to rip open and scatter the contents over the road.

Presently we realized that all was quiet. After a few more minutes, hearing no movement, one of the men took a chance and lifted his hood. The robber was gone. Of course all

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one be introduced. The main address of the meeting was given by Father Florian Guest of the Academy of Franciscan History, Washington, D. C. His topic was "The Civic Administration of Towns in Early California", and dealt mostly with a town which never came into being, Branciforte.

Following the address the delegates enjoyed a country-style supper, served buffet by the Ladies of San Miguel, all of the food having been prepared by the Fathers and the Novices. After the meal the Padre Choristers entertained with vocal selections, which was quite special.

While the dishes were being cleared away, the delegates had an opportunity to visit and become better acquainted. This writer and her husband were privileged to have a very pleasant personal chat with Father Regis, and with Father David who was the host on Sunday at Mission San Antonio. Both of these gentlemen are possessed of a rare sense of humor; both are extremely friendly, understanding and personable. Father Regis related some of his interesting

life history which has been devoted mostly to missionary work, including 21 year's work with the Papago Indians in Casa Grande, Tucson, and Ajo, Arizona.

The meeting convened again at 7 p.m., in Padre Martin Hall. Mr. Ed Ainsworth of the Los Angeles Times was the speaker, and he talked about the restoration work which had been done at Mission San Miguel, and the work which was planned for the future. Following this, Father David Temple gave an illustrated lecture of Indian life at Mission San Antonio, after which the meeting was adjourned.

And so the first day of this very interesting meeting was ended. Once San Miguel was a spot where all travelers stopped over for a rest, when the Mission offered hospitable welcome to all who came. But now San Miguel Mission seems lonely with the loneliness of one whose helpfulness is no longer needed. And though San Miguel never attained great prosperity, due to agricultural drawbacks, the Mission has "sought to atone for lack of outward grandeur by aspiring to an inner glory."

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was immediately bustle and excitement: Jim could not leave his horses, but the men, under his directions, gathered up the scattered mail and put it back into the ripped sacks as best they could.

Jim made a record breaking run down the grade and into San Luis Obispo that night. They never caught my nice highwayman. He simply disappeared and left no trace - and I was glad. It was thought by many that he was Black Bart, the notorious California highwayman, who made life so miserable for Wells Fargo and Co. in those days.

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